

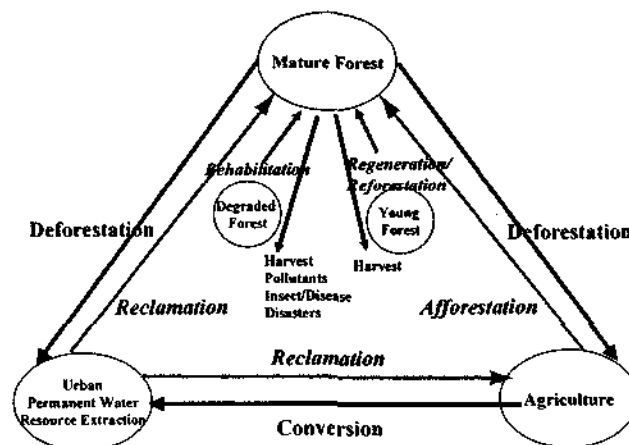
11 IT'S NOT JUST SEMANTICS: WHY CLEAR COMMUNICATION MATTERS

John Stanturf¹, Palle Madsen²

¹ US Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Athens, Georgia, USA, e-mail: jstanturf@fs.fed.us

² Danish Forest and Landscape Research Institute, Vejle, Denmark

Increasing reliance on English as the medium of interaction between professionals has fostered the globalisation of science research. Because forest management is conducted openly across large landscapes, even local issues attract international attention and most ENGOs (environmental non-governmental organizations) "speak" English. The IUFRO organization has long fostered international collaboration and coordination of forestry research and has programs in place to translate forestry terminology between languages. Nevertheless, practitioners in emerging fields of research such as forest restoration do not agree on definitions for terms such as restoration, rehabilitation, conversion, or transformation and discussion about definitions and terminology is critical to making progress on pressing issue. Through participation in IUFRO, the authors have identified needs and encountered obstacles to clear communication about forest restoration research, and the objective of this paper is to share this experience in order to increase awareness of the potential problems in clearly communicating results to multiple audiences. Besides scientists needing to communicate clearly amongst themselves and with managers, they must communicate credibly with the public. This means avoiding jargon while maintaining precision in their messages. Increasingly, definitions of what is a forest and how a forest is established and managed are critical to effective policy. We illustrate four communication pitfalls that are probably general to global forestry science that we have encountered in forest restoration research. Whatever one feels about it, English is the dominant language of international science. (1) The most common pitfall we have encountered occurs when there is no appropriate technical term and an author attempts a literal translation from his or her native language into English, without regard for the meaning of the term to a native English speaker. (2) Another pitfall is the inappropriate extrapolation of a localized usage to a broader context. (3) We are all familiar with unnecessary pedanticism, or the attempt to impose academic definitions onto what actually happens in the forest. (4) Finally, we have encountered a subtle problem when terms are transposed between cultural and historical contexts.



We illustrate four communication pitfalls that are probably general to global forestry science that we have encountered in forest restoration research. Whatever one feels about it, English is the dominant language of international science. (1) The most common pitfall we have encountered occurs when there is no appropriate technical term and an author attempts a literal translation from his or her native language into English, without regard for the meaning of the term to a native English speaker. (2) Another pitfall is the inappropriate extrapolation of a localized usage to a broader context. (3) We are all familiar with unnecessary pedanticism, or the attempt to impose academic definitions onto what actually happens in the forest. (4) Finally, we have encountered a subtle problem when terms are transposed between cultural and historical contexts.